

Westward ho—the China dream and ‘one belt, one road’: Chinese foreign policy under Xi Jinping

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When Hu Jintao stepped down as general secretary of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in November 2012 and as state president in March 2013, China’s place in the world had been transformed after his ten years in office. Above all, Chinese membership of the World Trade Organization (WTO) from December 2001 had inaugurated a phase of unbelievable growth that exceeded all expectations, inside as well as outside the country. By the end of June 2014 Chinese foreign exchange reserves had swelled to almost US\$4 trillion; at the end of 2001, before China joined the WTO, they had stood at US\$212 billion.¹

Yet China’s foreign policy had not been equally dynamic. Hu Jintao was extremely risk-averse and largely preoccupied with maintaining domestic economic growth. His colleagues within the regime were also having difficulty in coming to terms with the economy’s pulsating growth and could not be certain how long it would last. In any case, despite the scale of economic success, there were still hundreds of millions of Chinese living in poverty. And while per capita GDP had reached nearly US\$8,000 (or just over US\$11,000 in PPP terms), putting China in the category of a middle-income country, inequality had also grown rapidly, reaching South American or southern African levels. This had become a source of sensitivity for the regime. Hu had responded with an ideological campaign to create a ‘harmonious society’ (*hexie shehui*), a term with Confucian overtones. Occasionally this concern overflowed into rather vacuous foreign policy statements that urged international harmony as well, but generally China resisted attempts by the United States and others to encourage it to play a more positive role in international affairs. Chinese leaders were still in thrall to the admonition of Deng Xiaoping in 1989 that China should adopt a low profile in the aftermath of the massacres around Tiananmen Square that year and, when still confronted by international isolation, adhere to the so-called *tao guang yang hui* doctrine. In other words, China should ‘coldly observe, secure our positions, cope calmly, conceal our capabilities and bide our time, keep a low profile, never take the lead and make a contribution’.² The tone of foreign policy was still set on the one side

¹ ‘China’s foreign exchange reserves, 1977–2016’, <http://www.chinability.com/Reserves.htm> (unless otherwise noted at point of citation, all URLs cited in this article were accessible on 24 May 2016).

² For a discussion of the various ways in which Chinese and western commentators have interpreted this phrase, see Xiong Guangkai, ‘China’s diplomatic strategy: implication and translation of “tao guang yang hui”’, Chinese People’s Institute of Foreign Affairs, *Foreign Affairs Journal*, no. 98, Winter 2010, <http://cpifa.org/>

by books from patriotic sceptics in the second half of the 1990s, who responded to criticism from the West with titles such as ‘China says no’, ‘China still says no’ and ‘Why does China say no?’,³ and, on the other side, by the possibly more numerous proponents of China’s ‘soft power’ potential, who believed that rapid economic development allied with the magnetic power of civilizational greatness would win China friends around the world. A lot of effort was put into developing China’s image and ‘brand’.⁴ Under Hu Jintao, China had begun to contribute more to UN activities such as peacekeeping, it had taken the lead in setting up the Shanghai Cooperation Organization in 2001, and it was a key player in the BRIC (then BRICS) group of emerging powers, along with Brazil, Russia, India and, later, South Africa. However, the recurring Chinese response to requests for action was still, if not ‘no’, then all too often non-committal, although towards the end of Hu’s presidency there was evidence that Chinese policy-makers were beginning to think of becoming more active and even to recognize that the previously paramount principle of absolute respect for the sovereignty of nation-states might need to be adjusted, admittedly only under very stringent conditions.⁵ As Breslin remarked, China still seemed to lack ‘a clear, coherent and unified ... approach to international relations and the world order’. So China’s foreign policy objectives needed to be assessed through its actions rather than through any expression of doctrine.⁶

This article will focus first upon the campaign to realize the ‘China dream’ which became the dominant domestic theme of the Xi Jinping administration during its first two years, aimed at restoring the CCP’s ideological legitimacy and attractiveness, and at enhancing its self-confidence. It will then go on to consider the ‘one belt, one road’ initiative, Xi’s main foreign policy innovation, which represents his administration’s attempt to lay the basis for a more active and distinctive long-term foreign policy. It will make use mainly of published materials from China.

The China dream, and Xi Jinping takes over

Already during the second half of Hu Jintao’s leadership the idea of the ‘China dream’ had begun to take root and spread. One of the first to write on the subject was the then deputy head of the CCP Central Party School, Li Junru, who sought mainly to legitimize the party’s continuing rule through appeals to historical continuity and achievement. He set the tone for the official sponsorship of the

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³ Song Qiang, Zhang Weiwei and Qiao Bian, *Zhongguo keyi shuo bu* (Beijing: Zhonghua Gongshang Lianhe, 1996); Gu Qingsheng, Yang Zhengyu, Qiao Bian, Zhang Weiwei and Song Qiang, *Zhongguo haishi neng shuo bu* (Hong Kong: Mingbao, 1996); Peng Qian, Yang Mingshu and Xu Deren, *Zhongguo weishenme shuo bu?* (Beijing: Xin Shejie, 1996).

⁴ Li Xiguang, ed., *Ruan shili yu Zhongguo meng* [Soft power and the China dream] (Beijing: Falü, 2011).

⁵ Dingding Chen and Jianwei Wang, ‘Lying low no more? China’s new thinking on the *tao guang yang hui* strategy’, *China: An International Journal* 9: 2, 2011, pp. 195–216.

⁶ Shaun Breslin, ‘China and the global order: signalling threat or friendship?’, *International Affairs* 89: 3, May 2013, p. 633.

'dream' literature by declaring that the Chinese people had had a hundred-year dream of industrialization and modernization, and that the award of the 2008 Olympic Games to Beijing epitomized China's success. In other words, it was the dream of a successful, modern China rather than the dream of success for individual Chinese. And it was the CCP that had brought this about. The CCP had completed the liberation of China from imperialism and had built a 'rich and powerful, democratic, civilized, socialist-modernizing China'.⁷ Li presented the CCP as having provided the solution to the challenges that had confronted China over the previous 150 years, passing over in almost complete silence failures such as the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution. Implicitly he was concerned with restoring China's place in the world, but his emphasis was overwhelmingly on the need for economic development and the raising of the standard of living of the Chinese people. He set the goal of completing by 2020 the task originally set by his predecessor, Jiang Zemin, of creating a 'moderately prosperous' (*xiaokang*) society in China, which was interpreted as meaning a doubling of the average per capita income in 2000. While Li had restated the goal of a 'rich and powerful' country—a phrase that dated back to the Chinese reformers at the end of the nineteenth century, who in turn had taken the term from Japanese reformers of the Meiji Restoration—he focused much more strongly upon the 'rich' element than on the 'powerful'.

Gradually the concept of the China dream acquired wider currency and more complex resonances, with growing attempts to grasp or reformulate what the term might mean, for example, linking it to longer-term traditions of humanism in China.⁸ Symbolically, the Beijing Olympic Games in 2008, the 2009 National Military Parade and the 2010 Shanghai Expo were all used to propagate hopes and expectations of a resurgent China.⁹ The notion of a China dream began to catch on and spread beyond officialdom. In 2010 the Guangdong weekly newspaper 'Southern Weekend' (*Nanfang zhoumo*) compiled a list of prominent Chinese 'dreamers'. Economic reformers began to cite the objective of the China dream as justification for calls for reform, particularly encouraging more efficient use of resources, greater reliance upon consumption to stimulate growth, greater encouragement for creative industries and greater pressure on banks to lend to small business, all of which, they argued, could not be realized without further reform.¹⁰ Reformers concerned about China's deteriorating environmental conditions appealed to the China dream as justification for striving for a better balance between economic development and care for the environment.¹¹

Equally significantly, the international ramifications of China's rise and China's dream also began to attract attention. Some pointed to the possibility of a China

⁷ Li Junru, *Zhongguo meng* [The China dream] (Beijing: Xin shijie, 2006), p. 4.

⁸ Liang Ren, *Zhongguo meng: guanyu yige qingjie de chensi he kaowen* [The China dream: concerning a complex reflection and interrogation] (Zhengzhou: Zhongyuan nongmin, 2008).

⁹ William Callahan, *China dreams: 20 visions of China's future* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 1.

¹⁰ Zhou Tianyong, *Zhongguo meng yu Zhongguo daolu* [The China dream and the China path] (Beijing: Shehui kexue wenxian, 2011).

¹¹ Hu Angang, *Zhongguo daolu yu Zhongguo mengxiang* [The China path and the China dream] (Hangzhou: Zhejiang renmin, 2013).

dream increasing the country's soft power in the world.¹² On the other hand, more 'realist' interpreters of the China dream took advantage of it to articulate the vision of a China aiming at becoming number one in the world—and also, as a consequence, having to be prepared to stand up to a United States that would resist its rise.¹³ Indeed, the retired colonel Liu Mingfu argued that if China could not become the world number one in the twenty-first century, then it would inevitably be cast aside as a straggler.¹⁴

By the time of the elevation of Xi Jinping as CCP general secretary in October 2012 and as state president in March 2013, the 'China dream' had caught on. Although party officials had been involved in launching it, the idea had acquired a life of its own and had spread in many directions. Callahan has shown how it attracted a wide range of disparate interpretations from public intellectuals with a great variety of interests and concerns,¹⁵ reflecting the fluctuating currents of public opinion that underpin public policy in China. At the same time, at the top of the party, there was a sense of bewilderment and ideological confusion in the regime and among the people after so much rapid economic and social change. Lemos wrote in 2012 that many Chinese were anxious and unhappy despite all the material development.¹⁶ In those circumstances, as Brown put it: 'Creating a master narrative that copes with transformation, reform and transition while maintaining commitment to the statement of a coherent, overarching mission is important ... The Party has to appeal not just to people's material expectations, but their ideals, aspirations, hopes.'¹⁷ The China dream fitted that bill, and Xi began to trumpet it as one of the ideological objectives of his regime, just as the 'harmonious society' had defined those of his predecessor.

One of the attractions of the new term was its plasticity. It was vague, aspirational and open-ended. It offered a new narrative of hope that could supplement the older and by now rather tired ideological rhetoric of 'socialism with Chinese characteristics', and it might particularly inspire younger generations who were most interested in the long-term future. This was especially important because, as Liu Yunshan, now the Politburo Standing Committee member responsible for ideology, had written as long ago as 2005: 'Many cadres, and especially our young ones, are not willing to watch our news reports, nor to read our theoretical articles, nor to listen to our speeches.'¹⁸ It encouraged innovation and ambition for a better, fairer life. And the very idea of having a dream seemed unobjectionable. Who, after all, would not be attracted by the possibilities of dreaming of a better life? Who could oppose it? In general terms it looked as though Xi was

¹² Wu Xu, *Wei shijie dazao 'Zhongguo meng'* [Forge the 'China dream' for the world] (Beijing: Xinhua, 2009); Li Xiguang, ed., *Ruan shili yu Zhongguo meng*.

¹³ Liu Mingfu, *Zhongguo meng: Zhongguode mubiao, daolu ji zixinli* [The China dream: China's objective, path and self-confidence] (Beijing: Zhongguo youyi, 2010).

¹⁴ Cited in Callahan, *China dreams*, p. 16.

¹⁵ Callahan, *China dreams*, pp. 44–162.

¹⁶ Gerard Lemos, *The end of the Chinese dream: why Chinese people fear the future* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2012).

¹⁷ Kerry Brown, *The new emperors: power and princelings in China* (London and New York: I. B. Tauris, 2014), pp. 206, 208.

¹⁸ Cited in Brown, *The new emperors*, p. 204.

responding to public opinion as much as imposing objectives of his own. As Kerr put it:

The notion of the China Dream is a clever negotiation between collective identity and individual aspirations. It is rather like a large body of water—the dream reveals the Chinese people as having a collective will and identity shaped by a difficult history but at the same time if individuals and communities look closely into the dream they should be able to see their own reflection in it.¹⁹

However, if people were free to dream as they saw fit, where might all that dreaming lead? Where might it end if everyone sought to act upon their individual dreams?

Since 2012 Xi has shown himself to be concerned to reassert the leading role of the party, citing democratic centralism, with its emphasis upon the dominant role of the central leadership, much more frequently than his predecessors. Tsang has written of him reinforcing 'consultative Leninism' as the basic principle of rule.²⁰ An unpublished party document banned public discussion of the 'seven unmentionables', namely, universal values, press freedom, civil society, citizens' rights, the party's historical mistakes, the notion of a privileged capitalist class and independence of the judiciary. According to Lam, 'Xi went on to espouse the quintessentially Maoist stance of equating *dangxing* (the nature and characteristics of the Party) and *renminxing* (the nature and characteristics of the people)'.²¹ And Xi clearly aspires to be a stronger leader than Hu Jintao, having become the effective head of the armed forces as well as the party and the state much sooner than Hu did.²²

Xi strove to wrest back party control over the parameters of the China dream narrative from the public intellectuals, trying both to ensure that it remained compatible with the traditional core values of the regime and to freshen it up a bit. Equally importantly, the leadership needed to ensure that its version of the China dream became the orthodox one, for rivals in the party had their own aspirations to become dream leaders—for example, the disgraced Bo Xilai had made great play of his success in realizing the 'Chongqing dream'²³ (referring to the city where he had been party secretary) as part of his efforts to win a position of national leadership. Now the party propagandizes the 'core values' of socialism as 'prosperity, democracy, civility, harmony, freedom, equality, justice, the rule of law, patriotism, dedication, integrity and friendship'—a list that has got ever longer as time has gone on.²⁴ Media and educational establishments in China are now enjoined to uphold these values, however vague and platitudinous they may seem.

¹⁹ David Kerr, 'China's many dreams', in David Kerr, ed., *Comparative perspectives on China's search for national rejuvenation* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2015), p. 2.

²⁰ Steve Tsang, 'Contextualizing the China dream: a reinforced consultative Leninist approach to governance', in Kerr, ed., *Comparative perspectives*, pp. 10–34.

²¹ Willy Wo-Lap Lam, *Chinese politics in the era of Xi Jinping: renaissance, reform, or retrogression?* (New York and London: Routledge, 2015), pp. 85, 94.

²² Li Hongqiu, *Xin qiang ren Xi Jinping: nan yi zhuomode 'Zhongguo meng'* [New strong man Xi Jinping: the elusive 'China dream'] (Deer Park, NY: Ha ye, 2013).

²³ Li Xiguang, ed., *Ruan shili yu Zhongguo meng*, pp. 1–9.

²⁴ Du Yifei, '24-word core socialist values engraved on people's mind', *People's Daily*, 2 March 2016, <http://en.people.cn/n3/2016/0302/c98649-9023926.html>. I am grateful to Prof. Shaun Breslin for drawing this to my attention.

As Xi himself put it: 'The China dream is the inner meaning of upholding and developing socialism with Chinese characteristics.' Its essence was 'a rich and powerful country, revitalizing the nation and enhancing the well-being of the people'.²⁵ According to Gao Yu, a political commentator interviewed in Beijing: 'Xi's China dream is not the people's dream. What is intended is a red dream.'²⁶ By mid-2014, 8,249 articles with 'China dream' in the title had already appeared in China, according to the CNKI China academic journals database,²⁷ and this corpus of work spawned a secondary literature of its own of books for cadres to study so that they could better understand the term and its implications, as well as educate other party members.²⁸ At one level these works presented the idea of a China 'dream' as entirely normal and not exclusive to China, since other countries also have their own types of 'dream'. The notion of 'dream', however, became somewhat amorphous. It represented an amalgam of national traditions and experiences, national 'models' of ordering the economy and society, development trends and foreign policy styles. Who was doing the dreaming was not always made clear, although it usually implied elites. All of the examples to some extent reflected nationalist values. They were all presented as envisaging greater wealth and international power for their countries or entities. And the validity of distinctive non-European 'dreams' was also sometimes linked to the need to defend and promote a pluralism of distinctive 'civilizations' as well—a riposte to Huntington's book on the clash of civilizations.²⁹

China wishes to share its development experience and foreign philosophies with all countries, realizing the China dream and recalling the fine civilizations of other countries in the world; helping Japanese civilization, Indian civilization, Islamic civilization, Western civilization, Eastern Orthodox civilization, Latin American civilization, African civilization and all other civilizations to rejuvenate or retain their splendour, while at the same time studying the valuable parts of them.³⁰

One of the readers produced for CCP cadres devoted part of a chapter to four alternative foreign 'dreams', namely those of the United States, Europe, India and Turkey, selected as representatives of the developed and developing worlds. In one sense the easiest to present was the American dream, since so much has been written elsewhere about it. It was presented in a fairly orthodox fashion, highlighting individual opportunity, libertarianism, property rights, democ-

²⁵ Zhonggong Zhongyang Xuanchuanbu, *Xi Jinping zongshuji xilie zhongyao jianghua duben* [General Secretary Xi Jinping: a reader of a series of important speeches] (Beijing: Xuexi, 2014), pp. 27, 28.

²⁶ Cited in Li Hongqiu, *Xin qiang ren Xi Jinping*, p. 155.

²⁷ William A. Callahan, 'China dream: I', *Asian Forum*, 8 Dec. 2014, <http://www.theasianforum.org/what-can-the-china-dream-do-in-the-prc/>.

²⁸ See e.g. Qie Junxi, ed., *Zhongguo meng: dang yuan ganbu duben* [The China dream: a reader for party members and cadres] (Beijing: Hongqi, 2013); Wang Yingmei and Wang Jinjing, eds, *Zhongguo meng: dang yuan ganbu duben* [The China dream: a reader for party members and cadres] (Beijing: Yanjiu, 2013); Hong Xianghua, ed., *Minzu fuxing: Zhongguo meng* [National renaissance: the China dream] (Beijing: Hongqi, 2013); Shi Guoliang, ed., *Jiedu Zhongguo meng* [Decoding the China dream] (Beijing: Renmin ribao, 2013).

²⁹ Samuel P. Huntington, *The clash of civilizations and the remaking of world order* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996).

³⁰ Liu Dexi, 'Shixian Zhongguo meng shi dui renlei shehuidi xin gongxian' [The new contribution for human society of realizing the China dream], in Guowuyuan Xinwen Bangongshi, ed., *Jiedu Zhongguo waijiao xin linian* [Decoding the new concept of Chinese diplomacy] (Beijing: Wuzhou chuanbo, 2014), p. 136.

racy and market fundamentalism, but all this was supplemented with implications for American foreign policy behaviour, particularly its alleged tendency towards seeking hegemony as a manifestation at the international level of excessive American individualism. The Indian 'dream' was mainly presented as seeking Great Power status based upon traditional civilizational achievements, the strategic significance of the Indian Ocean as an ever more important transport route between the Pacific and the Atlantic, and India's increasing military might. The text confidently looked forward to India's becoming a Great Power when its economy was much more developed. The Turkish dream was presented as mainly a model of long-term stable economic growth, secularism and the separation of military and religious elites, and increasing democracy, which were all presented as potentially influential in the Islamic world, though whether President Erdogan would accept secularism as part of his dream for Turkey is doubtful. But for the time being, it was argued, Turkey was still being held back by lower levels of technological sophistication in its industry.

The 'dream' for which the writers of this book showed greatest sympathy was the European one. But this had little to do with any aspiration towards 'ever greater union', although they did mention that the EU experience might well become influential if and when Asian countries began to build their own regional community. Rather, what was highlighted was the European political economy of social capitalism, which was contrasted favourably with American market fundamentalism; the inclination of Europeans to live with pluralism and accept the interdependence of different communities, where Americans were supposedly inclined towards imposing uniformity; the European valuing of quality of life over material accumulation; the European preference for multilateralism instead of American unilateralism; and the greater willingness on the part of Europeans to use peaceful means and negotiation to solve global problems. Even though it was admitted that the European 'dream' was still in formation, it was presented as more appropriate for peoples around the world than the American one.³¹

This conformed to another apparent goal of the Beijing regime, namely stigmatizing unacceptable versions of the China dream and highlighting differences from the American dream. For example, the newspaper *Southern Weekend* was prevented from publishing a New Year's article which presented the China dream as constitutional government.³² Bao Tong, a former political secretary to the now disgraced CCP General Secretary Zhao Ziyang and now a political dissident, made freedom of expression the most important feature of his China dream.³³ Helen Wang, a Chinese writer living in the United States, wrote a book that took the idea of the American dream as a template for analysing recent changes in Chinese society: the rise of a middle class, followed by the rise of social values associated with the middle class, such as consumerism, individualism and democracy. She argued that the aspirations of the middle class would come to dominate Chinese society as

³¹ Wang and Wang, eds, *Zhongguo meng*, pp. 112–35.

³² David Kerr, 'Civil society and China's governance dilemmas', in Kerr, ed., *Comparative perspectives*, p. 46.

³³ Lam, *Chinese politics in the era of Xi Jinping*, pp. 82–3.

much as they had the American, and her analysis was translated and published inside China.³⁴ Now commentators were keen to reject this parallel.³⁵ In place of the individualism associated with the American dream, Xi Jinping has shown himself to be much more concerned with integrating the state, the people and the individual. ‘The China dream’s great characteristic is linking the country, the nation and the people into an entity with a common fate.’ He stressed the importance of the group rather than the individual at the lowest as well as the highest level: ‘The family is the smallest state, the country is ten million families.’³⁶

Xi has thus inclined towards those who seek to enhance the party’s and the regime’s legitimacy and to trumpet its great future by appealing not only to economic development but also to the great historical traditions of China’s 5,000 years of civilization—what Callahan has termed ‘nostalgic futurology’.³⁷

At root, however, as one commentator admitted, the China ‘dream’ is not just about the equal validity of the ‘models’ or ‘dreams’ of various civilizations in the world. It also reflects the conviction that the Chinese one was superior. ‘The China dream is one of surpassing ... the western development path.’³⁸ And this comment is confirmed by the proliferation of recent books in China that evoke a certain triumphalism, or at any rate confidence in China’s future successes. Where nearly 20 years ago the line of Chinese patriots was predominantly naysaying—‘China can say no’—now, echoing Obama and also former Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir, they simply assert ‘China can’ (win or do).³⁹

From China dream to ‘one belt, one road’

One important factor underpinning the China dream campaign has been the growing self-confidence within the regime over China’s economic achievements during the past decade, compared with both the developed world and other states in the developing world.⁴⁰ This increasing assurance has flowed over into

³⁴ Helen Wang, *The Chinese dream: the rise of the world’s largest middle class and what it means for you* (Bestseller Press, 2010); translated as Yi Lun (i.e. Helen) Wang, *Zhongguo meng: quanqiu zui dade zhongchan jieji jueqi ji qi yingxiang* (Shanghai: Wenhui, 2011).

³⁵ e.g. Shi Yuzhi, ‘Zhongguo meng qubie yu Meiguoguo mengde qi da tezheng’ [Seven major characteristics differentiating the China dream from the American dream], *Qiushi*, 20 May 2013, cited in Kerr, *Comparative perspectives*, p. 9.

³⁶ Zhonggong Zhongyang Xuanchuanbu, *Xi Jinping*, p. 28.

³⁷ William A. Callahan, ‘History, tradition and the China dream: socialist modernization in the world of great harmony’, *Journal of Contemporary China* 24: 96, 2015, pp. 983–1001. See also Christopher A. Ford, ‘The Party and the sage: communist China’s use of quasi-Confucian rationalizations for one-party dictatorship and imperial ambition’, *Journal of Contemporary China* 24: 96, 2015, pp. 1032–47.

³⁸ Liu Dexi, ‘Shixian Zhongguo meng’, p. 132.

³⁹ The most obvious example is Zhang Weiwei, one of the contributors to the series of ‘China can say no’ series of books mentioned above, whose most recent book is entitled *Zhongguo chaoyue: yige ‘wenmingxing guojia de guangrong yu mengxiang* [China surpasses: the glory and dream of a ‘civilizational state’] (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin, 2014). But see also Song Luzheng, ed., *Zhongguo neng ying: Zhongguode zhidu moshi heyi youyu xifang* [China can win: why China’s systemic model is superior to the West] (Beijing: Hongqi, 2012); Song Luzheng, ed., *Zhongguo neng ying: zhi you qu Zhongguo cai neng kandao weilai* [China can win: only if you go to China can you see the future] (Beijing: Hongqi, 2013); Ma Ya, ed., *Daolu zixin: Zhongguo weishenme neng* [Path self-confidence: why China can] (Beijing: Beijing Lianhe, 2014).

⁴⁰ Shiping Zheng, ‘Rising confidence behind the “China dream”’, *Journal of Chinese Political Science* 19: 1, 2014, pp. 35–48.

Chinese foreign policy and the rhetoric surrounding it, though Shi Yinhong has commented on the difficulty of reaching an overall view of the direction of Chinese foreign policy under the new leadership.⁴¹ On the one hand, there are clear signs of a more assertive, even 'triumphalist' foreign policy—Shi describes China as 'a re-awakening lion'. The People's Liberation Army (PLA) now lays much more stress on the need to develop the capacity to 'win victoriously' rather than just modernize its forces. Between February and July 2013 alone the PLA Navy Third Fleet carried out seven training exercises and military manoeuvres in the western Pacific.⁴² China has certainly hardened its line on territorial disputes with neighbours in the South China Sea. And, again according to Shi: 'Xi Jinping is proud of his hard-line posture towards China's rivals, big and small, and is keenly aware of the popular domestic support for his stance. He strongly prefers the strategic and operational approach of "pushing towards the bottom-line without breaking it".' On the other hand, many of its actual actions in the South China Sea have generally been restrained, it seems to have moderated its polemics in exchanges with Japanese Prime Minister Abe, it has shown itself willing to cooperate diplomatically with the United States over North Korea, Syria and Iran, and it has even appeared more willing to accede to US pressure to allow foreign (primarily American) companies in the service sector to operate more freely inside China.⁴³ All this makes it difficult to 'read' the overall tenor of current Chinese foreign policy. But there seems little doubt that the Chinese leadership intends to make a more active contribution to international governance.⁴⁴

Xi Jinping has been credited with launching a number of new foreign policy 'concepts'. Three are worthy of note. The first is the 'new type of Great Power relations', which is supposed to characterize Sino-American relations since Xi met Obama.⁴⁵ Second, there is the issue of relations with states around China's borders.⁴⁶ But the most eye-catching—and possibly the one with the longest-term significance—has been the third: the 'one belt, one road' initiative (OBOR).

Hu Jintao had earlier evoked the possibility of some kind of new Silk Road initiative, but it had not gone anywhere. Then in autumn 2013 President Xi visited Kazakhstan and Russia, where he announced plans primarily for transport projects with a view to creating an 'economic belt' or corridor linking

⁴¹ Shi Yinhong, 'China's complicated foreign policy' (Berlin and London: European Council on Foreign Relations, 31 March 2015), http://www.ecfr.eu/article/commentary_chinas_complicated_foreign_policy311562.

⁴² Gao Fei and Li Juanyang, 'Xi Jinping shidaide Zhongguo waijiao: chuancheng yu chuangxin' [Chinese foreign policy in the Xi Jinping era: continuity and innovation], in Guowuyuan Xinwen Bangongshi, ed., *Jiedu Zhongguo waijiao xin linian*, p. 99.

⁴³ Shi Yinhong, 'China's complicated foreign policy'.

⁴⁴ Camilla T. N. Sorensen, 'The significance of Xi Jinping's "Chinese dream" for Chinese foreign policy: from "tao guang yang hui" to "fen fa you wei"', *Journal of China International Relations* 3: 3, 2015, pp. 53–73.

⁴⁵ See Jinghang Zeng and Shaun Breslin, 'China's "new type of Great Power relations": a G2 with Chinese characteristics?', *International Affairs* 92: 4, July 2016, pp. 773–94 in this issue.

⁴⁶ See Katherine Morton, 'China's ambition in the South China Sea: is a legitimate maritime order possible?', pp. 909–940; Wu Xinbo, 'Cooperation, competition and shaping the outlook: the United States and China's neighbourhood diplomacy', pp. 849–67; Zhang Yunling, 'China and its neighbourhood: transformation, challenges and grand strategy', pp. 835–48; Zhao Huasheng, 'Afghanistan and China's new neighbourhood diplomacy', pp. 891–908; Zhou Fangyin, 'Between assertiveness and self-restraint: understanding China's South China Sea policy', pp. 869–90, all in this issue (*International Affairs* 92: 4, July 2016).

China with Mongolia, central Asia, Russia, Iran, Turkey, the Balkans, central and eastern Europe, and ultimately Germany and the Netherlands. Soon afterwards Prime Minister Li Keqiang visited south-east Asia, where he announced plans for a 'Maritime Silk Road' linking south-east China with south-east Asia, Bangladesh, India, the Persian Gulf and the Mediterranean, ultimately also ending up in Germany and the Netherlands. The two projects together comprise a series of overlapping elements—upgraded and developed transcontinental railway routes, highways, port facilities and energy pipelines. OBOR potentially involves over 60 countries with a combined population of over 4 billion people, whose markets currently account for about one-third of global GDP.⁴⁷

This makes it an enormously ambitious plan for long-term infrastructural development that will take decades to complete. China itself has recently committed up to US\$1 trillion to develop infrastructural investment transport links inside the country, much of which will go to the western part of China that will be part of the 'belt'. The Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), which China set up in 2015 to both complement and compete with the US- and Japan-dominated Asian Development Bank, reportedly has US\$65 billion in initial capital to support investments of this type; the China Development Bank has notionally reserved a further US\$890 billion for the development of various sections of the corridor outside the country. Some western estimates put the capital requirement for the latter much higher. The overall time-scale for the project has been set at roughly 35 years.⁴⁸

The underlying logic is somewhat analogous to the functionalist approach that launched the European Coal and Steel Community after the Second World War, in that it envisages the building of a shared cross-border infrastructure that will facilitate foreign policy cooperation and limit the risks of conflict.⁴⁹ At the same time, it should be noted that this initiative would lead to weaker cross-border integration than was intended in Europe, since it focuses upon creating shared transport links, while leaving the production structure in each country untouched. It makes no mention of an intention to create production facilities that would serve the markets of several countries, which might make the pressure to avoid conflict even stronger. It displays a greater sensitivity to national sovereignty than was the case in Europe. In that sense, it can be seen as Chinese-style or even 'Asian' integration. Wu has suggested a broad distinction between current Asian and European styles of regional integration: Europe focuses upon integration, which reflects European states' higher level of economic development, while Asia, with its greater diversity, puts a higher priority on connectivity and joint 'docking' (*duijie*) of nation-states still jealous of their sovereignty.⁵⁰

⁴⁷ For a map of OBOR, see Tim Summers, 'What exactly is "one belt, one road"?', *The World Today* 71: 5, Sept. 2015, <https://www.chathamhouse.org/publication/twt/what-exactly-one-belt-one-road>.

⁴⁸ 'Silk Road Economic Belt construction: vision and faith', in Chongyang Institute for Financial Studies, ed., *The Eurasian era: Blue Book of Silk Road economic study 2014–2015* (Beijing: China Economic Publishing House, 2014), p. 23.

⁴⁹ David Mitrany, *The functional theory of politics* (London: Martin Robertson, 1975).

⁵⁰ Wu Zelin, 'Tanxi Ou Ya liangzhong butongde quyue hezuo moshi' [Exploring Europe's and Asia's two different models of regional cooperation], *Zhongguo guoqing guoli*, no. 3, 2016, pp. 69–71.

All of this explains why some commentators in China have presented OBOR as a Chinese 'Marshall Plan', the sort of thing that Justin Yifu Lin, the former Director of Research at the World Bank, advocated that China should introduce so as to relaunch the world economy after the global financial crisis, but which the Beijing government then concluded was too expensive or too risky.⁵¹ Others continue to play down its scale, and note that in any case, if it is to meet the potential demand, it will need substantial contributions from other partners around the world. But if it were to succeed, the expectation that it would fundamentally rebalance global economic geography does not seem far-fetched.⁵²

Economic dimensions

One view of the rationale for these policy innovations is that they are primarily aimed at developing the western parts of China, which have been left behind by the eastward export-oriented strategy of the last four decades. These are the regions that are most distant from the coast, and so have had the greatest difficulty in competing with the more easterly provinces. They also have suffered from the political frictions with their neighbours to the west, for example in central Asia and India, which are also less developed. All these factors have hindered development in the western parts of China.⁵³ In 2013 per capita income in western provinces such as Gansu, Guizhou, Qinghai and Xinjiang was only between a third and a half of that in eastern provinces such as Guangdong, Fujian and Zhejiang, and only a quarter of that in Shanghai and Beijing.⁵⁴ In 2000 Beijing announced a plan for opening up the western part of the country, but by 2015 it was estimated that it was still going to need 30–50 years to catch up with the rest of China.⁵⁵ The OBOR initiative is partly aimed at speeding up that process.

Another—more immediate—consideration has been the Chinese government's search for alternative investment opportunities abroad for companies in China (predominantly state-owned enterprises, SOEs) that have been engaged in extensive infrastructural projects across the country for a decade or more, and now need to find alternative markets as the national economy is supposed gradually to rebalance away from its dominant focus upon investment and towards greater consumption. Participation in these new projects might both help individual companies and reduce the disturbance to the economy caused by the overall rebalancing.⁵⁶ The

⁵¹ Jin Ling, "'Yi dai yi lu': Zhongguo Maxie'er jihua' [One belt, one road: China's Marshall Plan], in Caixin Bianji Bu, ed., *'Yi dai yi lu': yinling Zhongguo* ['One belt, one road' guides China] (Beijing: Zhongguo wenshi, 2015), pp. 148–57.

⁵² Ma Bing, *'Yi dai yi lu': quanqiu fazhande Zhongguo luoji* ['One belt, one road': the Chinese logic for global development] (Beijing: Zhongguo minzhu fazhi, 2015).

⁵³ Hu Angang, *Zhongguo: min sheng yu fazhan* [China: people's livelihood and development] (Beijing: Zhongguo jingji, 2008), pp. 99–117.

⁵⁴ *China Statistical Yearbook 2014* (Beijing: China Statistics Press, 2014), table 6–20, <http://www.stats.gov.cn/tjsj/ndsj/2014/indexeh.htm>.

⁵⁵ Ma Bing, *'Yi dai yi lu'*, p. 61.

⁵⁶ For a sceptical view of the likelihood of these schemes' fully compensating for the downward pressure on the Chinese economy caused by the rebalancing towards consumption, see David Dollar, 'China's rise as a regional and global power: the AIB and the "One Belt One Road"', research paper (Washington DC: Brookings Institution, Summer 2015), <http://www.brookings.edu/research/papers/2015/07/china-regional-global-power-dollar>.

experience of becoming involved in projects overseas might help SOEs to become more internationally competitive—not an unimportant consideration, given that sector’s generally lower profitability than the private sector.⁵⁷ And the plans to develop high-speed rail links were no doubt framed with an eye to deepening and then later marketing China’s expertise in this technology.

In general, this slew of projects, and the fact of large-scale Chinese funding, could help a lot of Chinese companies—private as well as state-owned—to ‘go out’ (*zouchuqu*) and become implanted in new markets, so it should contribute to the further internationalization of the Chinese economy.⁵⁸ One commentator from Tajikistan specifically mentioned this in the context of the need to develop a regional integration project which avoided western-style neo-liberal economic policies. ‘For some perspective areas of Silk Road Economic Belt could be used not the principle of free trade, but the principle of soft protectionism [*sic*].’⁵⁹ More generally, particularly in the case of the Eurasian ‘belt’ initiative, commentators both in China and in central Asia have remarked on the opportunity the project would create for China to develop the use of the renminbi in international markets. This would increase Chinese experience in operating the renminbi as an international currency and represent a step towards the long-term goal of making it an international reserve currency.⁶⁰

At the same time there is a very wide range of risks to which this project may expose China. There are the political risks of instability in potential partner countries—for example, Afghanistan, Pakistan, various countries in the Middle East, possibly also in central Asia. There is the danger of a more high-profile China getting sucked into existing conflicts such as that between Israel and the Arab states, or at any rate being forced to take one side against another. There will be much greater involvement with the world of Islamic finance, which so far it has neglected. There is the danger of an increased Chinese presence in neighbouring regions stimulating fears about Beijing’s long-term intentions. For example, no matter how close Sino-Russian relations may be at present, especially given Russia’s chilly relations with the West over the conflict in Ukraine, it will still be difficult to mollify Russian fears about possible long-term Chinese designs upon Siberia. Already there are anxieties in Russia about this Chinese initiative eclipsing Russia’s own project for a Eurasian Customs Union and a Eurasian Economic Community linking Russia with central Asia.⁶¹

In addition to these political risks, there are various potential risks for Chinese companies in doing business along the economic belt. For example, if a Chinese

⁵⁷ Yasheng Huang, *Capitalism with Chinese characteristics: entrepreneurship and the state* (New York and Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

⁵⁸ Ma Bing, ‘*Yi dai yi lu*’, pp. 81–99.

⁵⁹ H. Umarov, ‘Silk Road Economic Belt: frontiers of integration’, in Chongyang Institute for Financial Studies, ed., *The Eurasian era*, p. 127.

⁶⁰ Caixin Bianji Bu, eds, ‘*Yi dai yi lu*’, pp. 98–103; Ren Xuan, ‘*Yi dai yi lu*’ *da zhanlue* [The big strategy of ‘one belt, one road’] (Beijing: Renmin ribao, 2015), pp. 52–5.

⁶¹ Boris Guseletov, ‘Vliianie ekonomicheskogo poiasa sholkovogo puti na razvitiie otnoshenii mezhdru Rossiei i Kitaiem’ [The impact of the Silk Road economic belt on the development of relations between Russia and China], in Chongyang Institute for Financial Studies, ed., *The Eurasian era*, pp. 28–44.

company operating there were taken to court by local businesses and appeared to receive unfair treatment from a less than impartial local legal system, what could and would either the company or the Chinese state do about it? After all, few of these states are noted for the rule of law. Or if it seemed that enhanced transport integration enabled Chinese companies, or even individual Chinese business-people, to put local companies out of business, how would China respond to demands from local businesses for greater protection, as has already happened in some African states? Not surprisingly, Chinese commentators have devoted quite a lot of space to analysing the various kinds of risks and the ways in which China might try to cope with them.⁶²

Geopolitical implications

Apart from the economic and business implications of this set of policies, and in addition to the moral dimensions of the China dream, it is important also to consider the long-term geopolitical implications. This perspective and the associated issues have not yet received a great deal of attention from Chinese commentators, even though this way of thinking about Chinese foreign policy has become more common over recent years.⁶³ It is certainly the case that foreign policy analysts more closely associated with the military have tended to view foreign policy in geostrategic terms. Often they have presented it in terms of a global game of chess or, more appropriately, the Chinese version of the Japanese game of *go*. Historically this kind of analysis has predominantly concentrated upon China's relations with the United States. The retired PLA senior colonel Liu Mingfu, for example, has viewed the twenty-first century as one long competition between these two countries for supremacy.⁶⁴ There is no doubt that for many years commentators in both countries have been enormously preoccupied with the significance of the actions of the other, more so than for any other country. For example, Shambaugh has edited a book characterizing the two as 'tangled titans'.⁶⁵

With America's 'pivot towards Asia', its recent conclusion of the Trans-Pacific Partnership agreement with several states in Asia (but not China), and continuing frictions between Washington and Beijing over the latter's maritime territorial claims, there is no likelihood of potential flashpoints disappearing any time soon. In this context, the 'one belt, one road' initiative is strategically important for two reasons. First, it demonstrates a Chinese concern to compete with the United States at least as much, if not more, through strategic economic policies as through military ones.⁶⁶ Second, it diverts some Chinese attention away from the Pacific and towards the west. Even though it is somewhat premature for the moment,

⁶² See e.g. Zou Lei, *Zhongguo 'yi dai yi lu' zhanluede zhengzhi jingjixue* [The political economy of China's 'one belt, one road' strategy] (Shanghai: Renmin, 2015), pp. 244–96; Wan Yining, Lin Yifu and Zheng Yongnian, eds, *Du dong yi dai yi lu* [Read and understand one belt, one road] (Beijing: Zhong Xin, 2015), pp. 279–96.

⁶³ Christopher R. Hughes, 'Reclassifying Chinese nationalism: the geopolitik turn', *Journal of Contemporary China* 20: 71, 2011, pp. 601–20.

⁶⁴ Liu Mingfu, *Zhongguo meng*, pp. 180–83.

⁶⁵ David Shambaugh, ed., *Tangled titans: the United States and China* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2013).

⁶⁶ Shi Yinhong, 'China's complicated foreign policy'.

the title of a recent book in China is noteworthy for the claim that we are now entering the Eurasian era.⁶⁷ Clearly this is also to some extent an oversimplification since it does not include consideration of the impact of the Maritime Silk Road. Yet the implication of all these projects is that they will increase Chinese interest and involvement in Eurasia, the Middle East and North Africa. Necessarily, therefore, they are likely to attenuate China's obsession with the United States, because they will require Beijing's global policy-making focus to be spread more widely, particularly forcing it to pay much greater attention to, and develop greater expertise about, regions of which it previously knew little, such as the Middle East. But in the shorter term, even if the United States continues to be extremely important in China's outlook, it means that Chinese leaders may not always be so preoccupied with the United States.

Alternatively, it has been argued, China's opening westwards may help to rebalance its relations with the United States. Sino-American relations in east Asia seem increasingly to be a zero-sum game. If China is not careful, it will find itself willy-nilly confining its strategic view to that region, whereas in west Asia there are more opportunities for China to play a new role and even possibly in some circumstances to cooperate with the United States. In any case, Wang argues that there are now more potential openings for trade with countries to the west (with the exception of India) than in east Asia.⁶⁸ In the longer term, all of this will help China to become more of a global as opposed to an Asian power. And from the perspective of Chinese *go*, it is also the sort of strategy that a player might adopt in a long game to surround or neutralize an opponent's more exposed or isolated pieces before gathering forces for an assault on the main stronghold.

Of course, there are many political risks for China inherent in the strategy, not least the difficulty of guaranteeing that the many partners that China needs to make the overall strategy work will respond as positively as it hopes, and that they will continue to do so over the long term. Wang mentioned China's lack of experience with the complexity of political issues in the Middle East and South Asia, as well as the lack of people with knowledge of the languages and cultures of the regions. It would be easy for China unintentionally to offend one party or another and then to find it difficult to extricate itself from the consequent rows. It could also antagonize global powers that already have a greater presence in the region, including the United States, the European Union and Russia. And what about the possibility of rivals or antagonists trying deliberately to undermine China's strategy, in the Middle East or elsewhere, so as to slow or even prevent China's further 'rise'?⁶⁹

Behind the explicit targets and objectives of the OBOR initiatives there remains one other possible goal, namely a long-term improvement in China's relations with Europe. All of the intended transport links are ultimately aimed at improving trade with Europe, as well as with countries along the Belt and the

⁶⁷ Chongyang Institute for Financial Studies, ed., *The Eurasian era*.

⁶⁸ Wang Jisi, 'Xi jin, Zhongguo diyan zhanlue "zai pingheng"' [Going west, China's geostrategic 'rebalancing'], in Caixin Bianji Bu, ed., 'Yi dai yi lu', p. 160.

⁶⁹ Wang Jisi, 'Xi jin', p. 161.

Road. Even if the Chinese government is concerned with promoting yet more Chinese exports to Europe, the facilities will also allow greater European exports to China in reverse. One commentator has suggested that the OBOR initiative represents an opportunity for Europe, in the form of the EU, to 'restore its civilization' by taking advantage of the opportunities for increased trade with all the countries along the route, such as Russia, as well as China. This should help Europe and China to 'join hands and remake the world'.⁷⁰ At the same time it is not fanciful to think that China hopes in this way to make Europe gradually more dependent economically upon China and less dependent upon the United States.⁷¹ One extra dimension of this geopolitical project is that it has been understood by some people in China as analogous to relations between the three kingdoms of Wei, Shu and Wu (220–80 CE), when the two weaker southern states of Shu and Wu allied to fight against the stronger northern state of Wei.⁷² From this perspective the parallel is with the two weaker 'states' of China and Europe as compared with the United States. Of course, the analogy is not entirely reassuring, because the third century CE was a time of great military conflict in China, which is something the country today is keen to avoid. Nevertheless, there is a renewed Chinese interest in Europe as compared with the United States—as witnessed in the preferences for European-style social capitalism in the reader on the China dream mentioned above. And Chinese commentators do point to America and Europe taking somewhat different paths after the global financial crisis.⁷³

Conclusion

Since Xi Jinping became leader, China's foreign policy has moved from risk-averse caution to optimistic 'dreaming' about a better world in which China will have recovered its rightful place. Whereas 20 years ago China used to keep saying 'no', or at best 'maybe', to the international community, now it wants to say 'yes', though without simply acquiescing in western hegemony. One Chinese commentator has suggested that China should convene a summit meeting of all the countries who agree to participate in OBOR to press for wider changes in global governance as well.⁷⁴ The hopes for the impact of the 'one belt, one road' initiative are grandiose, and if it is realized in full, it will indeed fundamentally transform the geography of global affairs, though the time-scale over which this

⁷⁰ Wang Yiwei, "Yi dai yi lu" shi ouzhou wenming fuxingzhi jiyu' [One belt, one road is an opportunity for Europe to restore its civilization], in Wang Yining, Lin Yifu and Zheng Yongnian, eds, *Du dong yi dai yi lu*, pp. 146–9.

⁷¹ Cf. Nadège Rolland, 'China's New Silk Road' (Washington DC: National Bureau of Asian Research, 2015, <http://www.nbr.org/research/activity.aspx?id=531>).

⁷² See e.g. the blog at <http://bbs.tianya.cn/post-worldlook-645677-1.shtml>. For an analysis of the significance of lessons from the Warring States era for China's relations with the United States today, see Michael Pillsbury, *The hundred-year marathon: China's secret strategy to replace America as the global superpower* (New York: Henry Holt, 2015), pp. 31–51.

⁷³ Yao Xiaohong, *Zhongguo meng: weilai guojia zhanlue yu Zhongguo jueqi* [The China dream: future national strategy and China's rise] (Beijing: Dangdai Zhongguo, 2013), p. 153.

⁷⁴ Pang Zhongying, 'Duobianzhuyi yu Zhongguo de "yi dai yi lu"' [Multilateralism and China's 'one belt, one road'], *Zhongguo yu guoji guanxi xuekan*, no. 2, 2015, pp. 1–13.

is envisaged as taking place is a long one. This perspective on the future has been accompanied by many commentaries that allude to the need for states in the new world order to achieve a better balance between obligations towards the world community and individual national interests.⁷⁵ China sees itself as taking a lead in that respect—accepting the need for greater obligations on its part to help others develop and realize a better world. In that sense it is responding in its own way to criticisms from the West, and especially from the United States, that hitherto it has been something of a ‘free rider’ in the international system.

In general, the OBOR initiative marks a new stage in the growing salience of geopolitical considerations in Chinese foreign policy.⁷⁶ While economic development issues still play a big role in structuring policies, the dream of restoring China to its traditional place in world affairs begins to loom over them.

But OBOR also rests upon a hope, indeed an assumption, that all of the many projected partners will respond with corresponding enthusiasm, because without their active cooperation the project will fail to live up to Chinese expectations and, worse, may founder amid a welter of recriminations over responsibility for its failure. In that sense it represents a serious test for Chinese assumptions about how the global community might move, or be induced to move, towards the better global order that it both advocates and expects. For all China’s (and Xi Jinping’s) self-confidence, the project depends upon active cooperation from others. China cannot realize it on its own. It makes great play of the fact that its vision for a future, and better, world order rests upon a commitment to shun the hegemonic policies of the United States and instead develop a more ‘democratic’ community in which all nations exercise their right to make a proper contribution to global governance, and in which they are all treated equally, irrespective of size. China overtly downplays the use of pressure to leverage cooperation—in any case, it lacks resources on the American scale to do this. So China expects other states to rise above potentially narrow self-interest. But all the talk of ‘win–win’ solutions to global development assumes that other states share China’s calculus about what ‘winning’ might mean. In fact, it is not difficult to think of obstacles. What about the possibility of, to use a common Chinese saying, ‘same bed, different dreams’ (*tong chuang, yi meng*)? Not every problem is susceptible to ‘win–win’ solutions. Some are zero-sum. For example, one dimension of the scenario outlined for the Maritime Silk Road is an expectation that this will lead to a more integrated Asian economic community, including states in south-east Asia.⁷⁷ Yet whether those states can be counted on to go along with this trend, even if it might lead to greater trade, when some of them are increasingly concerned about China’s uncompromising stance on its maritime territorial claims, is at least questionable.

There is a paradox about all this. As we have seen, the Xi Jinping administration has shown a determination at home to train ‘dreams’ of a better future into more ideologically acceptable channels. It is fully aware of the possibility of other

⁷⁵ See e.g. Liu Dexi, ‘Shixian Zhongguo meng’.

⁷⁶ Hughes, ‘Reclassifying Chinese nationalism’.

⁷⁷ Wang Baozhu, ‘Yi dai yi lu’ yu yazhou yitihua moshide chonggou [‘One belt, one road’ and the restructuring of the Asian integration model] (Beijing: Shehui Kexue Wenxian, 2015).

kinds of dreams taking hold if it is not careful. Yet at home the regime is still (largely) in control. It can—and increasingly again does—punish people who seek to promote alternative visions or values. But internationally China does not have that control. It cannot make other states give up dreams which conflict with its own. At most it can offer material inducements and appeal to other governments' better natures. In that sense it really is true that, as is often platitudinously repeated by Chinese commentators, the 'China dream' is, or has to be, the world's 'dream'.

That is why Chinese foreign policy now is both so optimistic and also so vulnerable: because its success does not lie in its own hands. It is difficult not to agree with the assessment (published inside China) of Yawei Lin, the Director of the China Program at the Carter Center in the United States, who concluded that:

There is no doubt the plan is one of great vision and potential. But it is also one with large [*sic*] number of uncertainties and carries a high risk of failure. It is doable. But making it work will be the greatest challenge President Xi and his team will face in the coming decade.⁷⁸

Moreover, given the long-term nature of the plan, the choices made by the current leadership and other states will continue to weigh upon the policies of their successors for decades afterwards. The change from a risk-averse China to one that embraces risk abroad, even as it continues to extol the paramount need for control and political stability at home, is astonishing.

⁷⁸ Yawei Lin, 'The challenges of building the New Silk Road Economic Belt', in Chongyang Institute for Financial Studies, ed., *The Eurasian era*, p. 218.